

**TIIAP FY 1999**  
**Project Narrative**

Fund for the City of New York

Grant # 36-60-99010  
Public Safety  
New York, New York

## **I. PROJECT DEFINITION**

**Problem** In recent years, the juvenile justice system and low-income neighborhoods in New York have struggled with the same problem: how to craft more meaningful responses to first- and second-time, non-violent juvenile offenders. Although the offenses (mostly drug possession and sales) may not be the most serious, these are important cases. Research indicates that these offenders are at risk of further, and more serious, involvement in the justice system.

Neighborhoods like East Harlem, a low-income community of about 100,000 predominantly Hispanic and African-American residents in a designated empowerment zone, feel the impact of these cases daily. The statistics are grim. East Harlem produces disproportionately high numbers of drug arrests.<sup>1</sup> Police report that drugs are sold in over 100 local storefronts and street corners, many located near schools.<sup>2</sup> East Harlem also has a disproportionately large youth population, a high drop-out rate and high rates of poverty and female-headed households (see Appendix A).

Local residents who participated in a series of neighborhood focus groups cited drug sales and drug use as the top local youth crime problems.<sup>3</sup> They reported that they are unable to counter the lure of the streets and the multiple problems that can lead to delinquent behavior: overcrowded schools; inadequate after-school opportunities; the lack of positive role models; an absence of effective family supervision; pervasive negative peer influences; and the promise of easy money. Residents have few links to the government agencies charged with dealing with the problem of delinquency. The result is a debilitating sense of powerlessness.

Meanwhile, the juvenile justice system experiences its own frustration with non-violent youth charged with delinquency. The New York Family Court is burdened with limited resources and burgeoning caseloads. In this environment, first and second time non-violent offenders often fall between the cracks. For example, 35 percent of *all* delinquency cases are held in abeyance without a formal filing in New York Family Court. First-time non-violent offenders are particularly likely to have prosecution delayed until they re-offend. This effectively means that nothing happens in these cases: offenders receive neither punishment nor help -- they don't even have to appear in court unless they are rearrested. By adopting a triage approach that devotes the lion's share of resources to the most serious cases, the Family Court system passes up a golden opportunity to make a difference in the lives of young people before they become hardened recidivists.

If part of the problem is making the argument that cases involving first- and second-time non-violent delinquents are worth targeting, another part is providing the system with the tools it needs to craft more effective solutions. Even when the system tries to respond to these cases, it has no consistent means of coordinating referrals to services or monitoring their provision. There is inadequate follow-up and little consequence for non-compliance. The unintentional lesson conveyed to offenders is this: there are few consequences to delinquent behavior. After

---

<sup>1</sup> Odubekun, Lola. The Vera Institute Atlas of Crime and Justice in New York City. Vera Institute of Justice, 1993.

<sup>2</sup> Community District Needs Manhattan Fiscal Years 1997/1998. The City of New York. Office of Management and Budget. Department of City Planning. 1996.

<sup>3</sup> These focus groups were convened by the Center for Court Innovation on September, 1997 to January, 1999 and included residents, community leaders, police officers, social service providers, children's groups and youth.

repeated arrests, the consequences mount significantly. By then, it is often too late for successful intervention.

And how does the community fit into the process? The New York juvenile justice system has a poor record of communicating with the institutions that have the most impact on juveniles – families, neighborhoods, peer groups, schools. Nor are the juveniles active participants in setting goals of behavior and compliance for themselves. They typically have little role in the process, leaving them detached and jaded. The impact is clear: without meaningful involvement from the offender or the community institutions, the chances of successful intervention are greatly diminished.

***Solution*** In response, the Center for Court Innovation is working with the New York State Unified Court System to launch an ambitious experiment in juvenile justice in East Harlem. The Harlem Juvenile Treatment Court (JTC) will be the first community-based court in the country to link young offenders at the earliest stages of delinquency to comprehensive community-based services, including drug prevention and education and counseling. The Court would craft a ‘service plan’ for each individual offender. Compliance would be monitored by the judge through technology and regular appearances in court. Using a system of graduated sanctions and rewards, the court would encourage long-term engagement in social services (see Appendix B).

To date, the Center’s work in Harlem has been underwritten by the Upper Manhattan Empowerment Zone, the State Justice Institute, the Public Welfare Foundation and the New York State Unified Court System. The Juvenile Treatment Court will be located in a newly renovated courthouse on 121st Street and will hear up to 150 cases annually. All aspects of the process -- screening and assessment; service plans; juveniles’ participation in services; frequent visits to court; family participation; and graduated responses to misconduct – will be tracked on an internal MIS based on award-winning computer applications developed at the Midtown Community Court (see Appendix C) and the Brooklyn Treatment Court.

Building on this foundation, the Center for Court Innovation seeks TIIAP support to develop a unique technology network that would link the Juvenile Treatment Court and other juvenile justice agencies to community-based service providers, juveniles and their families. The Harlem Juvenile Treatment Network would enable each of these players to review and update information directly on the JTC’s internal MIS. The goal is to improve the response to 1st and 2nd-time juvenile offenders, using technology to engage both government and the local neighborhood in crafting and monitoring service plans.

The Network would include an interactive web application that would establish a common electronic workplace to knit fragmented partners into a coordinated team (See Appendix D). For example, the Network would permit community-based service providers to review the court-ordered service plan for each youth assigned to their program.<sup>4</sup> They would be able to suggest modifications and record information about juveniles’ participation in services for

---

<sup>4</sup> Service plans would specify milestones for educational achievements; requirements for participation in treatment, services and computer training; schedules for court appearances before a dedicated judge and meetings with probation officers and/or case managers.

review by other partners. This would represent an unprecedented, collaborative approach to solving the problems of young people. In addition, the Network would allow juveniles and their families to review and comment upon service plans; sign contracts agreeing to JTC conditions; review compliance history calendars (usually available only to Court personnel); and make entries about milestones and achievements directly onto the network. By encouraging juveniles to participate in their own service plan via neighborhood-based computer terminals, the Network would expand access to technology, providing a difficult to reach population with crucial computer skills. All told, the Network would:

Build communications links

- link community-based service providers, schools and government agencies electronically, providing each with access to appropriate case-related information;
- promote the sharing of information among these players – groups that have previously had little regular communication;
- hold partners and juveniles accountable for supplying information about treatment in a timely fashion, monitoring juveniles' progress and compliance with court orders.

Place the youth at the center of the treatment and recovery process

- give participants and family members a role in crafting service plans;
- engage the juvenile in monitoring his compliance by ensuring regular access to 'Compliance Overview' screens; and
- establish dedicated pages for youth to publish accomplishments, achievements, explanations of lapses in compliance, essays or letters of apology, notes and milestones.

Promote community-based computer access and literacy training

- provide juveniles and guardians with easy access to four dedicated networked computers at the JTC and six dedicated computers at selected community-based agencies, along with access to the network at several neighborhood settings (schools, libraries) via the Internet;
- provide computer training at the JTC and at selected community-based locations.

In the process, the Network would go beyond previous attempts to improve computer access in under-served communities. Although prior efforts have successfully engaged motivated youth, they have not provided at-risk youth with a compelling reason to gain familiarity with computers. At the JTC, computer use would be essential to a young person's successful participation in treatment. Juveniles would routinely use networked computers to review their weekly obligations. Treatment and service partners would encourage participants to use the Network by having youth map key life events and goals on personalized entry screens. The judge would reinforce this message from the bench. In these ways, the Network would provide at-risk youth with significant incentives to develop computer proficiency.

In sum, the Network would be a powerful new tool, helping government and community institutions work with juveniles and their families to build a comprehensive response to delinquency in a high-risk neighborhood. As drug courts and community courts proliferate across the country, the Network has potentially far-reaching implications; if successful, it could serve as a model for a new, community-based judicial response to juvenile delinquency.



**Outcomes** The Network is designed to benefit both delinquent offenders and the partner agencies that coordinate and monitor their progress. Expected outcomes include:

*Juveniles*

- increased involvement in the process of treatment;
- successful participation at the Harlem Juvenile Treatment Court;
- increased computer access and competency;
- reduced truancy and improved school performance; and
- reduced recidivism.

*Partners*

- increased information sharing among government agencies and community-based partners;
- access to more timely and accurate information about juvenile progress in treatment;
- improved accountability for both offenders and partners.

**II. EVALUATION** Research examining the implementation and effects of the Network would include both qualitative and quantitative research. It would be carried out by independent evaluators, headed by Jeffrey Fagan from the Center for Violence Research and Prevention (CVRP) at Columbia University -- one of the nation's leading delinquency researchers.<sup>5</sup>

*Formative Evaluation* A formative evaluation would employ semi-structured interviews and observations to document the process of developing and implementing the Network and review perceived barriers to implementation. It would document satisfaction with the Network among various user groups, including Probation, Court personnel, case managers, treatment and social service providers, staff at city agencies and the juveniles themselves. Information from these interviews would be shared early with the project to help address implementation problems.

The formative evaluation would also review users' *perceptions* of how the Network affected their ease of access to information; team coordination; and the timeliness of information exchanged. It would examine perceptions of how the Network (and JTC) affected juveniles' computer use and computer literacy; compliance with service plans; truancy and school performance; participation in supportive services; family engagement in treatment; and the extent of subsequent offending. Once the Network was fully operational, the formative evaluation would also draw on the JTC's MIS to document characteristics of juvenile participants; compliance with Court mandates; retention and graduation rates; and the nature and frequency of juvenile postings.

*Impact Evaluation* A separate impact evaluation would examine the following:

- *the effects of the project on user satisfaction* as documented by baseline and follow-up interviews with juveniles and project partners;
- *the project's impact on juveniles' computer use and computer literacy*, based on comparing baseline and follow-up interviews;
- *the project's ability to support an integrated youth-centered approach*, based on pre-post

---

<sup>5</sup> In partnership with CCI research staff, the CVRP team is participating in the planning process for the Juvenile Treatment Court. CVRP will serve as the independent evaluator for the various youth initiatives implemented at the Harlem Community Justice Center.

interviews with Network members, youth and family members. Research staff would also begin examining long-term project outcomes on *school attendance* (pre-post analysis of attendance) and document *rates of re-offending* during project participation.

**III. SIGNIFICANCE** The Network provides an innovative strategy for introducing new technology – dynamic, interactive Web applications – in an under-served community to accomplish two goals: increasing computer literacy among a hard-to-serve, disengaged population and building a coordinated response to the problems of delinquents and their families. It can serve as a model for collaborative efforts to develop constructive responses to youth crime in high-risk neighborhoods throughout the nation. It is unprecedented in its effort to link juvenile offenders, their guardians and community partners (service providers, the project's Advisory Board) to a problem-solving Network. Traditional juvenile justice initiatives have never before sought to incorporate offenders and community members directly on-line. Nor have they engaged juveniles themselves in the process of monitoring their own progress, given them an electronic 'voice', expanded computer access and enhanced computer literacy. The project can serve as model for over 400 adult and juvenile treatment courts nationwide, not only in establishing electronic links to a broad spectrum of partners but in making on-line skill-building an integral part of 'treatment', broadly conceived.

**IV. PROJECT FEASIBILITY** To enhance success, a comprehensive six-month Network development process would engage institutional partners (e.g., Probation, judge, Board of Education) and selected community-based partners (treatment providers and service agencies) in reviewing screen designs, establishing procedures for sharing information, addressing confidentiality concerns, documenting information needs and specifying partner obligations (see Time-Task Table, Appendix E). Formal agreements with selected community-based Network members would be finalized by month three. Development of the application would begin in month seven.

**Technical Approach** The Network relies on three components: 1) an internal MIS at the JTC, 2) an interactive Web application and 3) expanded community access to technology (See Appendix D).

- 1) The system builds on the JTC MIS. The MIS will be a robust client-server application, based on the Center's Brooklyn Treatment Court computer application, the standard for New York State drug courts. Operating on the courthouse's local-area-network, the internal MIS supports all the basic functions of the Court – psycho-social assessment; tracking program attendance; graduated sanctions. (Development of the MIS, supported by funds from the New York State Unified Court System, is outside the scope of this project. See Appendix F for preliminary MIS screens.)
- 2) An interactive web application would allow off-site partner agencies to access information about JTC participants and permit participants to play an active role in their treatment.
- 3) The Network would expand electronic communication in East Harlem and among agency partners, capitalizing on the Web's low technological threshold. The technical requirements of partners are limited to modems, PCs, standard commercial browsers and access to phone lines, all of which the project will purchase, as necessary. In addition, the Network team will create a computer training room at the JTC that will provide technical support and training for

participants.

The technical approach to developing the Network involves:

Web Technology. TIIAP funds would support a simple, interactive web application permitting Network participants to both review and update information on-line. The application would be built using Microsoft's Active Server Pages to facilitate rapid development. Developers would also take advantage of JavaScript and VBScript programming languages to provide enhanced functionality to users. The application would reside on a web server at the Harlem Courthouse.

The application would permit participants, depending on their roles and authorized privileges, to review the findings of the psycho-social assessment; review participants' service plans; update referral and placement records; enter detailed records about participation in services; review a graphical summary of a participant's overall progress; and coordinate plans with other team members. Youth participants would be able to review their service plan requirements, update records about achievements and milestones, post essays and letters of apology, and review the compliance overview information recorded by agencies and service providers (See Appendix D).

Confidentiality. Security features for the Network would employ both system-wide and application-specific approaches. System-wide, only authorized users could access the Network web server through the proxy server for the New York State Unified Court System (UCS). Access would be limited by the rigorous, well-tested security standards of the statewide court information system. On an application level, after user names and passwords were issued, each user would be associated with a specific group (e.g. service provider, Judge, case manager, youth), linked to appropriate, designated levels of access within the application, determined by extensive review of confidentiality issues (see section V). Timed log-outs and routinely updated passwords would enhance security.

Training. Training would involve two distinct strategies. 1) Users at participating government agencies and community-based agencies, many of whom have experience with computers, would receive training upon implementation of the new Web-based Network tools. 2) Youth participants, many of whom have had little exposure to computers or the Internet, would receive thorough training upon entry into the program at the computer training center, to be located at the Harlem Community Justice Center. Beyond the initial training, youth participants would build competency with new technology as an integral part of juveniles' participation in the service plan.

**Development Program** The project would take place in four stages:

Stage One: Planning and Implementation of Internal MIS As discussed above, the project would begin with a six-month Network development process. At the end of this stage, the JTC's internal MIS would be implemented.

Stage Two: Development of Interactive Web Application. Beginning in month seven, stage two would involve development of the interactive web application by project staff in partnership with a technical consultant. The consultant would be responsible for discrete development tasks.

Stage Three: Expanded Access. With web application development underway, project staff would assess the technical needs of Network members and develop a detailed plan for



establishing the minimum technical environment, including plans for equipment purchases, telecommunications installation and Network implementation. The Computer Training Center would be set up.

Stage Four: Roll-Out and Training. In the final stage of the project, the Network would be implemented and training of users and participants would begin.

**Interoperability.** Built with widely available, industry standard tools, the Network would be replicable both statewide and nationally. It will employ well-established technology standards – including a Sybase relational database, a TCP-IP network protocol, a Windows NT server – and information search and input tools would be programmed in Microsoft’s Active Server Pages. (See Appendix G for an outline of technical specifications for the system.)

**Scalability.** The Juvenile Treatment Network would be a pilot. The strategy of using the World Wide Web and an interactive web-application facilitates wide-scale expansion at low cost. Establishing new users simply involves 1) creating a new user account and 2) having the new user establish access to the World Wide Web and install a commercial browser on an existing PC.

**Qualifications** The Center is a national leader in developing cutting-edge court technology. The Center’s first technology innovation (the Midtown Community Court application) received top prize for public sector innovation at Windows World Open 1995, has been featured in *Wired* and *Computerworld* magazines and was included in the 1997 Innovation Collection at the Smithsonian. An independent evaluation, conducted by the National Center for State Courts, acknowledges the Center as a “first mover” in innovative Court technology (see Appendix H). Another Center project, the Brooklyn Treatment Court, has the nation’s most advanced drug court MIS and was selected by the Justice Department for training other drug courts. The Center has recently developed the nation’s first integrated information system for handling domestic violence cases. This Web-based application links together the courts, police, state registry, attorneys and service providers. In developing the Network, the Center would draw upon lessons learned in designing these systems.

The Center is a project of the Fund for the City of New York.<sup>6</sup> It works in close partnership with the New York State Unified Court System. Winner of the 1998 Innovations in American Government Award, the Center develops demonstration projects and promotes court innovation nationally. (See appendices I and J: Center description and qualifications of team members.)

**Budget, Implementation, Schedule and Timeline** The total project budget is \$1,029,442. This reflects the cost of 1) planning and designing the Network; 2) implementing the communications infrastructure required for the Network; 3) developing the web application to support Network communications; 4) training for staff users at participating agencies and community-based organizations; 5) computer training for youth; and 6) an independent evaluation of the Network.

---

<sup>6</sup> The Fund for the City of New York, established by the Ford Foundation in 1968 to enhance the effectiveness of government and nonprofit organizations, assists the City and State with strategic planning, convenes professional exchanges and provides technological support.

Because of the burdens associated with the documentation of in-kind costs, substantial in-kind project expenses, to be covered by the Center and the Unified Court System, are not reflected in the budget. These include: facility maintenance; telephone services for staff use and the Network; office equipment (photocopy, facsimile, postage meter); network maintenance contracts; and office software licenses. Other JTC costs (e.g., youth counselors), supported by the State of New York, the Upper Manhattan Empowerment Zone, the State Justice Institute and private foundations, are also not reflected in the budget. See *Development Program* section above and Appendix E for timeline.

**Sustainability** The Juvenile Treatment Network would be a component of the larger Harlem Community Justice Center, being jointly developed by the New York State Unified Court System, the New York City Mayor's Office of the Criminal Justice Coordinator and the Center. As discussed above, the project has received significant in-kind and cash support from its partners, the Upper Manhattan Empowerment Zone, the State of New York and private foundations. As with other Center projects (e.g., the Midtown Community Court and the Brooklyn Treatment Court) after a demonstration period, supported by local, Federal and private funding, the costs of operating the Harlem Community Justice Center are expected to be fully institutionalized. Once the Network itself is developed, the costs of sustaining it (e.g., phone costs, routine maintenance) will be minimal.

**V. COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT** The Juvenile Treatment Network is the product of extensive community outreach in Harlem with elected officials, community leaders and residents, local service providers, the courts, attorneys and Probation (see appendix K for list). A Community Advisory Board, including both community representatives (schools, churches, youth agencies, elected officials, local businesses, parents and youth) and representatives of government agencies, will meet regularly to advise staff on the development, implementation and operation of the project, and review program reports generated by the project director (see appendix L for list of board members). As described above, Network end users will include community partners, youth and their families as well as agency partners. An on-site Network Administrator will train youth and guardians to use networked computers at the JTC and remote locations; community-based service providers will also be trained to use the Network and to assist juvenile participants in its use. (See appendix M for a list of network partners.) (See appendix N for letters of support.)

*Protecting the Privacy of Community Members.* Maintaining confidentiality is a significant concern. JTC case managers would coordinate collection and transmission of information and be responsible for executing 'treatment contracts', consisting of confidentiality waivers between the youth/guardian, case managers, the court and all other participants. Signed agreements would specify procedures for sharing information needed to develop and monitor the service plan. To help address privacy issues, the Center has hired an attorney-consultant with wide experience in the juvenile justice field to research confidentiality issues at pre- and post-adjudication stages.

**VI. REDUCING DISPARITIES.** According to research compiled by the NTIA, areas such as East Harlem have extremely limited access to technology. Groups that predominate in East

Harlem – Northeast “Central City” residents, Blacks and Hispanics, the poor, the uneducated, and female-headed households – are some of the least connected groups in terms of PC ownership and access to on-line services. (See appendix A for a summary of research on access to technology.) The Network would increase access to technology by providing equipment to community-based participants who do not have network-capable systems; requiring juvenile offenders to monitor treatment progress electronically; training juveniles in the use of computers; and placing four computers at the JTC and six additional computers at other locations in the community.

**VII. DOCUMENTATION AND DISSEMINATION.** The Center would document Network accomplishments through a Handbook, describing the JTC application and Network, and through the evaluation report. It would disseminate these documents broadly to judges, justice professionals, the drug court community, court administrators and court MIS professionals. Project staff would make presentations about the Network at professional conferences and through the Center’s web site, *communitycourts.org*. Demonstrations of the Network would be a standard component of the many site tours expected at the Harlem Youth Justice Center. In the past, the Center has broadly disseminated information about custom technology applications. For example, the Center distributed over 2,000 copies of “Experiments in Technology” – documenting the Midtown application – to criminal justice professionals, the media and federal libraries (reproduced in appendix C).